

In the marbled and *Seafoam Dream*-smelling in-suite bathroom attached to the room he'd been allotted, Jax turned in front of the mirror again, bumping his horns on the lights while he tried to crouch low enough to be in all view, and sighed.

*What am I even doing?*

Hats'utsil Resort, like any other building for general living-in he had ever been in, was not sized for him. Or rather, he was not sized for it. He ducked under each doorway, per usual, and when he went for any of the miniature kitchen appliances or the door panels, he had to stoop to reach. Similarly, he now conceded examining himself wholly in either of the mirrors — the wide and gilded one above the sink or the floor-length one on the wall — was a futile endeavor. He lowered himself down on his haunches and simply focused on his hair, once more combing a few locks into just the right place. The entire breadth of the counterspace was littered in his grooming supplies and tools, along with the tiny bottles of amenities and soaps provided by the resort.

They were too small for him to open, not that he intended to use any of them when he had his own preferred products. He had simply pierced the lotion bottle with a claw to get a proper smell of it.

Hats'utsil's idea of dreamy seafoam was not to his liking. Then again, he was very particular about scents. A sensitive predator's nose tended to be.

Finally content for the moment with his hair, Jax neatly packed his things back into their specific pouches that would then return to his duffle at the end of the trip, wiped down the counter and the shower and floor, folded the towels back up, and ducked out of the washroom. Straightening up — the ceilings were high, bless Kikkalekki — made his back throb in both relief and displeasure. He groaned with it, stretching for a minute. He had the time. His standard AAF-issue chrono indicated it was still a half hour until twenty-one-hundred hours. Selen's days numbered twenty-seven hours, so all told, it seemed a reasonably late-evening but still proper time of night for a date.

A date.

What a concept that was.

Jax had never been on a *date* in its traditional romantic sense. Gone merrymaking with his brethren and troops, his friends, yes. Gone for drinks one-on-one, even with someone he did fancy after, yes— purely platonic, of course. Made offers of dinners, yes, but never with any expectation.

And here someone had asked *him*.

The hybrid completed his stretches and smothered the incredibly strong urge to return to the refresher and check his hair for the third time. He still wasn't certain he was dressed as best he could be to achieve a date-appropriate look. This white-collared shirt was nearly exactly the same as the one he had been wearing at the poolside earlier in the day, but Kobgin had seemed to have no issue with it then, so why would he now? Did it need to be more different? Most of his wardrobe entailed his daily fatigues, combat uniforms, his dress uniform, a set of AAF armors, and of course his Mandalorian armor. Some casual and exercise clothes completed the set. It all managed nicely and orderly in his various closets and footlockers or rucksacks, depending on where he was living at any particular moment for assignment. He had brought all his casual and nice-casual clothes to the resort.

The slack pants were likely a little too formal for the occasion, but the resort was very nice; they fit even the most casual moments here.

Kikkalekki, what indeed *was* he doing? Fussing over his appearance and his outfit. How his battle-brothers would laugh.

He was still uncertain this was truly a good idea. Kobgin was likely half his age, and he had nothing to provide the man in any sense most-sought after of the *romantic* dating sort. That was, however, not information easily conveyed, and moreover, he respected Kobgin's choices and thoughts. It was most of why he had agreed in the first place, when the Human had first made the proposition at the picnic on the Parade Grounds some weeks ago. Their various respective duties and activities had prevented them from speaking again about a drink they had agreed to get, "tomorrow." Running into one another here at the resort had not been planned nor expected, but was a pleasant surprise.

If it was even a surprise. Atyiru had insisted he join the Clansmen in this. His eyes narrowed. He knew her too well not to realize he had been set up. Had she invited Kobgin as well? That would be very like her. Perhaps he would ask.

...on their date. In — he checked the chrono — twenty minutes.

A date.

Well, Kobgin had asked, and he had respected that and agreed, so here he was, was he not? That was that. The man would find out for himself the ways in which Jax was unsuitable to his interests and they would both perhaps have gained another friend. Or, as unlikely as it was, Kobgin would wish to ask him on a *date* again, and Jax would answer that too. Whatever it was that Kobgin decided, Jax would respect it, and make his own decisions just as the Human was doing.

On a date.

Abruptly, the hybrid strode over towards the unused bed, pivoted about-face, and flopped back onto the mattress. It sprung him up again something fierce with the recoil of his weight before he settled. His thighs and legs hung off in a sprawl as was normal. He threw his only arm over his eyes and growled.

Was this really a good idea? He had gone almost fifty years perfectly well with no dates. There was age to consider, and potential conflict in their respective Armed Forces positions. And Jax's heart already held two people who would never love him as he did them; did it really have room for a third?

And besides, earlier, had that not been odd? When Jax had shown the Human the reading he was doing on Korda? It was evident to him that the Human had struggled slightly reading over the page, his gaze slow and expressions ticking here and there on the native Selenian — because the original language of a text was *always better* than a translation, and yes, Professor, I *will* debate you on this. How could Kobgin not know some of his own native language? That was strange. The kind of specific and strange he had been trained to look out for over the years in counterintelligence courses.

But no, he was being silly, was he not? Looking for excuses and inventing things where there were none. So what if Kobgin struggled with Selenian? He was a spacer child from his comments; Basic was all most anyone needed. And besides, Jax had met plenty of people in his lifetime that were unfortunately undereducated through so many different circumstances it was impossible to count.

He blew out a breath.

"So nervous, you might be a sandhopper," he chided himself.

Nervous. For a date.

He had never been on a date.

Goddess, he *was* nervous, was he not?

Clearly, he needed an intervention. The hybrid sat up, moved back to the bathroom to fix his hair that he had messed in his moment of dramatics, and thought.

He could not ask Atyiru for help; she was useless about judging physical appearances and would only be all too giddy to shove him out the door singing ballads and making up wedding invitations for his nonexistent grandchildren. There was his crew...

Sera would say they needed to fight first, for honor, and then likely suggest they take a roll in the sheets. Karran might at least stop at the fight before a dinner. True Zabrats, the both of

them. Avery would help with an outfit but...well, he tended to come on strong to women and barely comprehended Jax's reservations with physicality. Eilen... Was a non starter, and so were Sulith and Alaisy, unless he intended sacrifice or popcorn. Leeadra seemed distressed enough by her own relationships, and they had little rapport yet.

No, not the Voidbreakers. And talking long and hard to his mothers after prayers had not helped these past few hours.

Which meant he knew what he had to do.

This was going to be *horrible*.

The comm picked up on the fifth ring.

"'lo? *Wha's up, karkin'*— *Jaaaaaxxie, s'that you? HEY CATDADDYO. How is ya?*"

"Hello, Quinn," the hybrid managed, ears folding back and brow furrowed in resignation. He did not bother to point out she had agreed to never, *ever* call him that again the last time he had paid her bar tab and made sure she got home to Arcia. "Do you have a moment? I am in need of advice. I have been asked on a date."

The excited screech that came from the other end of the line was so loud that he was fairly sure the tiny speakers broke. He winced.

Yes. Yes he was going to regret this.

-X-

As it turned out, fifteen minutes of objectively terrible advice, giggled panic, lewd jokes, and Elequin calling in Jasper for *actual* assistance passed very quickly and unhelpfully. Jax felt no better by the time he hung up and decided to make his way down to the lobby where they had agreed to meet and pick one of the many bars and restaurants available.

The time truly was here. He was going on a *date*.

His hand was actually shaking. He was a *demolition's expert*, for Goddess's sake. His hands—hand *did not shake*. Never had except for moments of intense distress, each of which he had discussed each with his therapist for their caliber.

The Mandalorian took a bracing breath. He could do this, could he not? It was not going into battle. It was a date.

But perhaps—

A knock sounded on his door. His ears flicked to it in upright alertness as his head wiped about, nose twitching. Smoothing his shirt and hair a last time, he got up and went to the door, ducking and stretching to open it; peering through the keyhole was pointless for him.

The scent that hit him was faint cigarra smoke and spice, mixed up under a not entirely unpleasant but quite strong to his nose aftershave. Tousled curls and a smile greeted him. His breath lodged in his chest around a rumble.

"Hello," Kobgin said, tilting his head several degrees back to look up at him. His clothes were noticeably fresh, one button undone at the collar, sleeves rolled back though his typical glove still covered his cybernetic hand and forearm. His posture was loose. "I know we were going to meet downstairs, but I thought I would come to you. More time I get to spend in your company."

And he. Winked?

Jax was very practiced at keeping his mouth shut— literally. His teeth scared others, and he had long mastered variations of closed-mouthed and small smiles gauged to a given situation or audience, from distressed civilians and children to cool superior officers, his snarls reserve for enemies.

It did not stop his jaw from falling a little right then. He promptly closed it, this time on words he had decided against saying when they met at that picnic.

*I was enchanted to meet you*, he had thought, nearly breathed, then. Now, a different thought tripped through his brain. *Please do not belong only to someone else. Please do not have someone waiting on you.*

He wanted a chance.

"Go get 'em, J!" Quinn had cried before he hung up, and then much more softly, and he knew she meant it, and her sweetness broke his heart, *"You deserve this!"*

"I—" Jax began, and was smiling, had to work hard to keep it contained and unobtrusive, "am delighted by that. You are full of the most wonderful surprises, Kobgin. Shall we then?"

The Selenian stepped back, giving him room to duck out and close the door behind him. He offered his only arm. Kobgin laughed lightly and took it, which involved more reaching up to hang on loosely than anything else so that Jax was not hunching all down the hallway.

"Yeah, let's go."